

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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P R 031133Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1218

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3521

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT LIMBO: UP THE BACKSTRETCH, INTO THE TURN

REF: BANGKOK 3330

SUMMARY:

THE DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN CABINET MEMBERS TOOK THEIR PLACES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE MINISTRIES MARCH 3. WHILE THIS DOES NOT CLEAR THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S POWERS BEFORE THE MARCH 6 VOTE OF CONFIDENCE (REF), IT DOES GIVE THE CABINET A FEW POINTS IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR RAGING IN THE BANGKOK PRESS. THE STRAINS OVERRTHE CONFIDENCE VOTE HURDLE ARE APPARENTLY BEGINNING TO CRACK THE UNITY OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN CABINET HELD A FORMAL MEETING MARCH 1 AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE TO DISCUSS THE POLICY STATEMENT WHICH IT WILL SEND TO THE PARLIAMENT MARCH 6,
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THE CABINET MEMBERS TOOK THEIR PLACES AT THE VARIOUS

MINISTRIES MARCH 3.

2. THE MARCH 6 VOTE OF CONFIDENCE DOMINATES THE THAI POLITICAL SCENE. MOST OF THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PRIVATE MANEUVERINGS OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS ARE RELATED TO THAT CRUCIAL VOTE. PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL NOT ASK THE KING TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT IF HIS GOVERNMENT LOSES MARCH 6. THE DEMOCRATS HOPE THIS STATEMENT WILL TAKE PRESSURE OFF THE SPLINTER PARTIES WHO FEAR THE DEMOCRATS WILL CALL FOR ELECTIONS. IN THE MEANTIME THE DEMOCRATS HAVE MADE ANOTHER EFFORT TO COURT THE LEFTIST PARTIES, INCLUDING A COMPROMISE ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE (BANGKOK 3520), RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND REVISION OF THE ANTI-COMMUNIST LAW.

3. OPPOSITION PROPAGANDA HAS COUNTERED WITH CHARGES THAT PRIME MINISTER SENI BOOK A BRIBE, AND THAT HE VIOLATED THAI POLITICAL ETIQUETTE BY NOT SEEKING A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE BEFORE THE CABINET TOOK THE OATH IN THE KING'S PRESENCE. ACCORDING TO "THE NATION" OF MARCH 2, SOCIAL ACTION PARTY LEADER KHUKRIT PRAMOT SAID THAT THE CABINET'S POLICIES WERE "VAGUE".

4. THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE HAS BECOME AN ISSUE IN THE PROPAGANDA WAR PRECEDING THE MARCH 6 VOTE. THE DEMOCRATEASOCIAL AGRARIAN POLICY STATMENT APPARENTLY WILL CALL FOR TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE WITHIN 18 MONTHS. AS A VARIATION ON A THEME, CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, THAI NATION SECRETARY-GENERAL, IS QUOTED IN THE CHINESE PRESS MARCH 2 THAT THAILAND SHOULD NOT ALLOW THE AMERICANS TO USE THE AIRBASES IN THAILAND TO ATTACK THE KHMER ROUGE AND RESCUE THE LON NOL GOVERNMENT. SLIGHTLY OUT OF TUNE, YAI SAWITCHAT, SOCIAL ACTION PARTY PARLIAMENTARIAN FROM NAKHON SAWAN, SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ASK THE UNITED STATES TO INCREASE ITS TROOPS IN THAILAD BECAUSE OF THE UNFAVORABLE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA.

5. THONGDI ITSARACHIWIN (DEMOCRAT-CHIAN MAI), LONG TIME POLITICAL MAVERICK, ANNOUNED TO THE BANGKOK NEWSPAPERS CONFIDENTIAL

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OVER THE WEEKEND THAT HE AND OTHER PARTY MEMBERS COULD NOT SUPPORT THE CABINET'S POLICIES AT THE MARCH 6 VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. THIS ANNOUNCEMENT IS IN KEEPING WITH THONGDI'S PERSONALITY, AND MAY REFLECT OPINIONS WITHIN THE DEMOCRAT PARTY OPPOSED TO FORMING A MINORITY GOVERNMENT. THE WHOLE EPISODE MAY ALSO BE ANOTHER TWIST IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR RAGING IN THE BANGKOK PRESS.

6. APHILAT OSATANON AND TWO OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD (NESDB) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION (DTEC) SEPARATELY TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR FEBRUARY 28 THAT THEY FELT THAT PRIME MINISTER SENI WOULD WIN THE MARCH 6 CONFIDENCE VOTE. WHEN PRESSED, APHILAT SAID THAT THE ONLY RATIONAL THING FOR THE OPPOSITION WAS TO GIVE THE DEMOCRATS THE CHANCE TO HANG THEMSELVES, WHICH THEY COULD WELL DO IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE OPPOSITION MAY NOT BE RATIONAL, HOWEVER, AND COULD SEEK TO DEPOSE SENI AT THE MARCH 6 HURDLE WITHOUT THINKING THROUGH THE EFFECTS. ALL THREE AGREED THAT PUBLIC OPINION WOULD BE INTOLERANT OF OPPOSITION ATTEMPTS TO THWART A SENI GOVERNMENT.

7. COMMENT: IN THE BATTLE OF NERVES PRECEDING THE MARCH 6 VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, THE DEMOCRATS HAVE WORKED HARD TO CHANNEL PUBLIC OPINION IN THEIR FAVOR. THIS SITUATION MAY ACCOUNT IN PART, FOR PRIME MINISTER SENI'S THREE TRIPS TO CHIANG MAI. CHUAN LIKPHAI, DEPUTY MINISTER OF JUSTICE, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER FEBRUARY 25 THAT THE DEMOCRATS WERE CERTAIN OF THEIR PUBLIC SUPPORT, BUT WERE CONCERNED ABOUT PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION. TO INSURE PUBLIC SUPPORT AND GARNER A FEW VOTES TO THE LEFT, THE DEMOCRATS HAVE RECENTLY MADE COMPROMISES ON SEVERAL ISSUES, INCLUDING THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE.
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